

When Law Labels Bandits: The Progression of 20th Century Immigration Law and the
Italian Community's Response, 1919-1965

A Senior Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for graduation *with research
distinction* in History in the undergraduate colleges of The Ohio State University

by

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June 2012

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Dedicated to: My grandparents, Frank D. and Joanne M. Casali, My great-grandparents Domenica and Domenico Casali and to the rest of my family.

A Special Thanks: I would like to thank Professor Donna Guy for mentoring me throughout this research project, for assisting me in applying for an honors travel grant to perform archival research at the University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center and for providing extensive editing and feedback on this thesis. This project would not have been possible without the excellent guidance and assistance from Professor Guy, which began during my second year at Ohio State. I would also like to thank Professor Judy Wu for agreeing to serve on my defense committee and providing her extensive feedback and editing. Moreover, I would like to thank Professor David Steigerwald for agreeing to serve on my committee and for reviewing my thesis. Finally, I would like to thank the members of the University of Minnesota Immigration History Research Center in allowing me to conduct research at their facility and providing assistance during my research.

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Introduction

One of the most recognized American films seen on televisions year after year is the Christmas drama, *It's a Wonderful Life*. A relatively unimportant scene from the middle of the film depicts the main characters using the phrase *garlic pickers* without hesitation. Although the term utilized by the central figures remains unnoticed and unquestioned today, closer examination within the context of the film reveals that “garlic pickers” refers to Italian or other Mediterranean immigrants living in poor neighborhoods. Rather than an ethnic term of endearment, “garlic pickers” embodies a derogatory, ethnic slur denigrating those who immigrated to the United States from Mediterranean region in the twentieth century.

The use of “garlic pickers” captures the overarching sentiments about immigrants at the time of the film’s release in 1946 and may embody the feelings toward Italians in the aftermath of World War II, in which Italy represented one of the ultimate fascist threats aligned with Nazi Germany. Not only did Italian immigrants face explicit and implicit biases against their ethnicity, immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe encountered grave obstacles originating in the American legal system. The legal barriers occurred in the form of strict immigration laws that imposed a system of quotas aimed at limiting the immigration of certain ethnicities from parts of Europe and completely excluding certain races altogether.

The aim of my thesis is to argue that the American legal system and immigration policy served as the principal burden for those who attempted to enter the United States during the twentieth century. Furthermore, this thesis argues that Southern and Eastern Europeans did not successfully oppose immigration restriction during 1920s because of

the overwhelming nativist sentiment against these groups. On the other hand, I argue that the period of the 1950s and 1960s offered Italians and other ethnicities a new era of political activism because the sweeping social changes brought about by the Civil Rights Movement and Cold War liberalism allowed these groups to achieve success in opposing discriminatory immigration laws. Taking advantage of these factors, I argue that the American Committee on Italian Migration centralized Italian political and social groups as well as Catholic and labor organizations to become a prominent force for the Italian community¹ in ending national origin quotas and aiding newly arriving immigrants. Strategically, working for the end of national origin quotas allowed the Italian community to become politically active and allowed the admittance of more Italian immigrants who sought entrance to the country. On a symbolic level, engagement in these causes demonstrated that Italians were desirable immigrants and productive citizens. Hence, the end of national origin quotas signified the legal transformation of the Italian racial status from undesirable to desirable and non-white to white.

This research project has three primary objectives: to analyze the development of early immigration policies and understand the context in which they targeted ethnicity and ideology; to examine the methods and activities of Italian immigrant organizations that responded to immigration laws; and to reveal how the contributions of these immigrant mutual aid societies resulted in major legal changes that dictated the status of immigrants across the United States. The first chapter of this thesis explores how immigration policies developed following the First World War and how federal

¹ I recognize that just as any other ethnic group, Italians do not represent a single, monolithic community. For the purposes of this thesis, the Italian community and Italian Americans are those who were politically and socially active in increasing Italian immigration and advocating for immigration reform in the United States. These Italians were leaders, members and the beneficiaries of the organizations in which they participated. This description of the Italian community is consistent with the work of Danielle Battisti, "The American Committee on Italian Migration, Anti-Communism and Immigration Reform," *Journal of Ethnic History* 32, no. 2 (Winter 2012): 33.

immigration laws discriminated against the ethnicity and ideologies of immigrants seeking entrance to the United States. Moreover, the first chapter examines the nativist sentiments following global conflicts and how certain immigrant could be labeled bandits by the law based on their racial status. In particular, the first section of my thesis observes how Italians did not fully embody a “white” identity during the 1920s and how their racial status changed through political advocacy in the 1950s and 1960s. Although heated political debates on the topic of immigration occurred prior to the First World War, which largely focused on Asian immigration, my thesis focuses on the political polarization that intensified in the early twentieth century and resulted in restrictive immigration policies that governed immigration law for decades. Covering the development of the national origins quotas codified into federal law by the 1921 and 1924 Immigration Acts and the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act provides the necessary context for understanding why the law served as a central barrier for immigrants seeking entrance to the United States.

Expanding on the development of restrictive immigration laws, the second chapter of this thesis utilizes a case study approach that examines how two Italian immigrant groups in the Chicago region responded to these new policies. Specifically, the second chapter reveals how two Italian mutual aid societies, the American Committee on Italian Migration (ACIM) and the Order of the Sons of Italy in America (OSIA), worked to assist Italian immigrants in both social and political realms. These mutual aid societies waged an effort to provide sponsors, employment and housing to Italians while simultaneously lobbying lawmakers to enact policy changes that would benefit the Italian community. The final chapter analyzes the contributions of the ACIM in bringing about

the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which effectively ended the discriminatory framework of immigration laws based on national origins quotas.

My research seeks to build upon the existing scholarship on Italian immigration and the development of restrictionist, discriminatory immigration policies in the United States during the twentieth century. By utilizing a top-down and bottom-up approach, my work explores how federal policies, or “the state” caused the mobilization of individuals and groups that sought to amend existing law. Conversely, my thesis observes how these individuals and organizations lobbied government to influence the development of major policy changes. Aside from my overall approach, many of the secondary sources found on Italians and immigration restriction in the twentieth century highlight a particular topic of historiography, especially the “golden age” of immigration that occurred during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Furthermore, recent scholarship on Italians has focused heavily on the transformation of Italian race from non-white to white. While these topics are indeed important and discussed in this work, my thesis sheds new light on the period of the 1950s and 1960s by utilizing a case study to “tell the story” of Italian committees functioning at the height of the Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement.

Although the Civil Rights Movement has garnered significant scholarship and rightfully so, the immigration debate that occurred during this period has received considerably less attention by contemporary historians. Therefore, my thesis seeks to illuminate the 1950s and 1960s as a very significant period in immigration history that merits as much attention, focus and study as the popularized “golden age” of immigration. Not only did the immigration debate usher in a new period of recognition and political advocacy for ethnicities such as Southern and Eastern Europeans, it allowed

the transformation of immigration policy that is still relevant in today's political landscape. In addition focusing more attention on this period, the case study example found in this work is localized to the Chicago region and is interdisciplinary in nature, which incorporates the importance of law, ethnicity, race, political organizing, social history and is not confined to examining a single scope of immigration history.

While the evolution of Italian ethnicity over time is certainly relevant and discussed in this study, I focus more on how federal law served as a central barrier in the lives of immigrants and how Italian mutual aid organizations in my case study worked in their interests to both carry out provisions of existing law while working to change federal laws altogether. The ACIM and other groups attempted these goals by fulfilling designated quotas and assisting immigrants while simultaneously working to change these federal policies by engaging in political lobbying and utilizing their vast membership networks. Unlike Italian interest groups that did not meet success in defeating national origins quotas during the nativist environment of the 1920s, the Italian mutual aid organizations in my case study capitalized on the growing reforms of the Civil Rights Movement during the 1950s and 1960s and contributed to changing federal policies on ethnicity, race and immigration.

Chapter 1 – Examining Comprehensive Immigration Policy from 1919-1952: Restricting Immigration Based on Ethnicity and Ideology

“For one, I am tired of seeing the name of Capone and other such names in every crime record that we read in our papers. I do not see the names of the Germans, the Swedes, of the English, of the Danes, *the true American names*, appearing in the crime records of the country, in agitators of the country who are trying to overthrow our form of government and do away with our laws and our institutions.”

-Daniel Steck, United States Senator, D-Iowa (1930)

“The strength of a nation – not to speak of its progress, its honor, its glory – the very strength of a nation lies in the oneness of its people.” This dramatic line spoken by Republican United States Senator Samuel Shortridge in 1924 during early twentieth century congressional debates on immigration reform conveys the heated rhetoric surrounding immigration reform in the 1920s.² However, the decade of the 1920s would not provide a lasting solution nor settle lingering concerns over the important issue of immigration policy in the United States. In fact, studying the political sentiments from the 1920s to the 1950s demonstrates that global conflicts such as World War I, World War II and the Cold War played profound roles in shaping how immigration policy unfolded in the United States. In addition to these monumental events, this chapter will examine how race, ethnicity and political ideology influenced the development of discriminatory immigration laws from 1919 to 1952 and how federal laws served as a central barrier in the lives of those desiring to immigrate to the United States. With ethnicity having importance in immigration policy at the time, the first chapter will observe how the racial status of Italians as “non-white” during the 1920s influenced society’s desire to restrict their migration.

² Vernon M. Briggs, *Mass Immigration and the National Interest* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), 68.

Following World War I, a renewed desire for isolationism and a strong nativist movement pervaded American political dialogue and congressional leaders took steps to ensure that American greatness and stability would remain strong in the aftermath of a massive, global conflict. The political debates during this period focused on limiting the influx of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe while simultaneously excluding certain races from citizenship altogether. In the eyes of those who favored restrictions, such limitations on who could immigrate prevented possible racial dilution. In contrast to policymakers who favored the liberalization of immigration laws, restrictionists advocated a system of national origin quotas that limited immigration from certain geographic regions and excluded those of Asian and African origin from citizenship. Passage of the 1921 Immigration Act and 1924 Immigration Act embodied this framework of discriminatory quotas championed by xenophobic restrictionists.

However, the enactment of comprehensive immigration laws that restricted immigration did not end in the beginning decades of the twentieth century. The Cold War ushered in an ideological conflict that permeated into America's immigration policies. While race and ethnicity remained an important consideration throughout the period of the Second World War, the international tensions during the Cold War caused American political leaders to advocate immigration restrictions to prevent those with ideological differences from entering the country. The McCarran-Walter Act reinforced national origin quotas, but focused more extensively on preventing the spread of communism and radical ideologies that immigrants could bring with them if they entered the United States.

Background: The Law as a Barrier and Italian Ethnicity

Although the purpose of this thesis is to examine how federal laws served as barriers to entering the United States during the twentieth century, it should be noted that the United States government maintained a history of excluding classes of individuals that began in the nineteenth century. These restrictions resulted in growing fear that certain groups had the possibility of becoming public charges and beliefs that these groups could possibly “corrupt” other American citizens. The restriction of certain “undesirable classes” began in 1875 when the federal government utilized its first immigration restrictions when it banned persons convicted of crimes of “moral turpitude” and prostitutes.³ Throughout the 1880s, a long list of “undesirables” developed that included those infected with disease, paupers, mentally retarded, contract laborers, polygamists and Chinese laborers.⁴ Other legislation during the nineteenth century created restrictions against Asian immigration through the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and by introducing the “Asiatic barred zone.”

With these restrictions based on moral, physical and racial considerations in place prior to the twentieth century, eventually restrictions extended to certain European ethnicities. Following the 1880s, discriminatory feelings against Eastern and Southern Europeans grew as social problems such disease, class conflict and poverty became associated with their mass migration to the United States.⁵ Eastern and Southern European immigrants tended to arrive in large numbers to the U.S. during the late 19th and early 20th centuries and were designated “new immigrants” to distinguish them from

³ Ngai, Mae, “The Strange Career of the Illegal Alien: Immigration Restriction and Deportation Policy in the United States, 1921-1965”, (Law and History Review, Spring, 2003), 73.

⁴ Ngai, Mae, “The Strange Career”, 73.

⁵ Ngai, Mae, “The Strange Career”, 75.

the large wave of mostly Western and Northern European immigrants who arrived during the mid-19th century. The post World War I period raised nationalist sentiment and heightened a sense of nativism against Eastern and Southern Europeans, which compounded social problems that already created fears against their migration.

Italians immigrating to the United States represented the exact type of ethnic group that became discriminated against by American government leaders with the emergence of anti-immigrant feelings after World War I. In the infamous 1916 book, *The Passing of the Great Race*, Madison Grant divided Europeans into a three-tiered hierarchy of lowest to highest in terms of ethnicity. At the bottom of the hierarchy was Mediterranean (Southern European nations) the middle included Alpine (Mid-European nations) and the highest was Nordic (Northern European nations). The Mediterranean ethnicity was “the most backward, uncivilized, and unfit for the rigors of democratic government.”⁶ However despite such discrimination, Italians occupied a very complex position in the racial hierarchy of America during the beginning of the twentieth century. Regardless of discriminatory feelings against Italians, many acknowledged that their European origin still made them “white” in a racial sense. Therefore, Italian ethnicity denoted them as “in-between people” during the early 1920s.⁷

Although Italian Americans could claim European origins, they could not claim the type of respectability afforded to Anglo-European immigrants from Northern Europe. Newspapers such as the *Chicago Tribune* questioned the racial desirability of Italians and portrayed them as inherently criminalistic in nature and biologically inferior. Eleven

⁶ Mary Anne Trasciatti, “Hooking the Hyphen: Woodrow Wilson's War Rhetoric and the Italian American Community,” in *Who Belongs in America?: Presidents, Rhetoric, and Immigration*, ed. Vanessa B. Beasley (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2006), 109.

⁷ Thomas, Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945*, (Oxford University Press, 2003), 11.

Italian immigrants were even lynched by a mob of angry citizens in New Orleans in 1891 after a police chief was murdered.⁸ Complicating Italian status was the fact that while society doubted the desirability of their ethnicity as Southern Europeans, many did not question their racial status as “whites” when compared to those of African, Asian and Mexican descent.⁹ Despite this ambiguous place, Italians became stereotyped as uncivilized and corrupt. Anglo-Americans questioned the loyalty and dependability of Italian-Americans throughout World War I since Italy originally entered the Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary, but later relented.¹⁰ Italians were therefore included as one of the primary ethnic groups subject to restrictionist, ethnically insensitive policies that severely limited their ability to immigrate to the United States.

Immigration policy in the United States dramatically shifted with the advent of World War I in 1914. Global mass migration to the United States and most other countries nearly halted, as it became extremely difficult or no longer possible for individuals to leave their home countries. As the international conflict ended in 1918, mass migration to the United States momentarily resumed in 1919.¹¹ A harsh reaction against immigrants permeated society following the Great War that dominated the political and social discourse of the period. Not only did racial and ethnic concerns prompt legislators to fear immigration, but dramatic events in Russia also caused anxiety over European immigration for different reasons. By 1917, Russia was overtaken by a turbulent Bolshevik revolution led by radical ideologues and other governments throughout Europe feared similar fates. To many in the United States, immigrants from

⁸ Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*, 27.

⁹ Thomas Guglielmo, “Encountering the Color Line in the Everyday: Italians in Interwar Chicago”, (*Journal of American Ethnic History*, June 2004), 57.

¹⁰ Trasciatti, “Hooking,” 109.

¹¹ Briggs, *Mass Immigration*, 67.

these countries could not effectively contribute to a democratic society because their ideological leanings and moral principles were not consistent with democratic ideals. Moreover, fears spread throughout the United States that allowing immigrants from countries with such radical movements could lead to civil disobedience, revolutionary activity and possibly an overthrow of the American government. European nations and the ideological leanings of their people were unfit for life United States. Political leaders were anxious to address such concerns and restricting the flow of European immigration became a viable option.

The Russian Revolution fueled the first Red Scare in the United States and eventually prompted the passage of the Immigration Act of 1917. This statute outlined six excludable classes, largely based on ideology, and allocated funds for the enforcement of deportation clauses that targeted immigrant anarchists and communists. The 1917 law resulted from post-war vengeance against individuals and groups with radical ideologies including anarchism and communism.¹² Eventually, these anti-radical sentiments aimed at immigrants justified government intervention against racial groups and ethnicities deemed “inferior” or “dangerous.”

After the “War to End All Wars,” American immigration policy became starkly re-divided between restrictionists who favored ethnic homogeneity and those who favored the liberalization of immigration laws and opposed restriction claims on the grounds that America should continue its policies of openness. For restrictionists, homogeneity reinforced stability and commonalities in religious affiliation, aspirations

¹² Ngai, Mae, “The Strange Career”, 74.

and beliefs.¹³ In other words, immigrants who came from countries that did not align with the United States in terms of ethnicity or ideology threatened American prosperity. Many government leaders who agreed with restrictionist views believed that homogeneity should be valued for what it made possible -facilitating an effective democratic system of government.¹⁴ Racial and ethnic differences reemerged as an overarching threat used to support restrictionist policies during this time period.

Throughout the debate, members of Congress proposed an array of policy decisions such as suspending immigration permanently, restructuring screening processes or basing the allotted number of immigrants allowed into the country on historic census figures. Census figures eventually became the principal data used to determine which racial groups and ethnicities could immigrate to the United States most likely because their incomplete nature allowed manipulation by government leaders who wanted to secure the dominance of Nordic Europeans. In fact, the nation's first census in 1790 did not include information on ancestry or national origin. Moreover, the census did not identify the places of birth of parents of native born until 1890.¹⁵ Allowing government officials further ability to manipulate the use of immigration statistics found in census materials was the fact that immigration was not officially recorded until 1907. Many geographic borders in Europe changed dramatically after World War I, which required the translation of political geography to reflect geographic boundaries in 1920.¹⁶ In other

¹³ Cheryl Shanks, *Immigration and the Politics of American sovereignty, 1890-1990*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 69.

¹⁴ Shanks, *Immigration and Politics*, 69.

¹⁵ Mae Ngai, "The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924", (Journal of American History, June 1999), 71.

¹⁶ Ngai, "The Architecture of Race", 71.

words, such incomplete immigration statistics found in census figures proved to be a problematic source of data to base future immigration policy.

Despite challenges imposed by census figures, a common theme developed in almost every single immigration policy proposal: restriction. Proponents far outnumbered those who favored liberal policies and restriction was both the most popular among citizens and the most politically viable for government leaders who desired the continued domination of Nordic Europeans over those considered ineligible for citizenship or ethnically undesirable.¹⁷ The proposal at the center of the debate transitioned from one outlining numerical limitations for immigrants based on country of recent immigrants' origin to one based on all Americans' countries of origins.¹⁸

The rise of national origins quotas emerged in Congress as the most feasible solution to the immigration question and had a profound effect on immigration policy for the next fifty years. National origins quotas solved many questions facing political leaders because the proposed quotas became based on the national origins of the entire American population instead of recent immigrants. Thus, no one could accuse the proposed policy as discriminatory and the quotas would accurately reflect the citizen makeup of the population of the United States.¹⁹ As the concept was introduced, the national origins quotas became popular among restrictionists and even gained some support among liberals who knew restriction policy was expected to pass. Henry Cabot Lodge, a strong voice for the restrictionists, stated, "If such a basis is adopted, there can be no question then of discrimination, because it will treat all races as alike on the basis

¹⁷ Shanks, *Immigration and Politics*, 89.

¹⁸ Shanks, *Immigration and Politics*, 88-90.

¹⁹ Shanks, *Immigration and Politics*, 90.

of their actual proportion of the existing population.”²⁰ Government leaders followed Lodge’s lead and others repeated such arguments during debate.

Aside from ongoing congressional debates on immigration, the presidential contest of 1920 proved to be important for those who desired immigration restriction. Before his ascent to the presidency, Warren G. Harding was known for his ability to be easily persuaded and for his passiveness during contentious political debates. Moreover, Harding had a long history of delivering speeches advocating his pro-restrictionist views on immigration.²¹ In a speech in 1916, Harding compared the perceived threat of immigrant disloyalty during World War I to the disunity resulting from the American Civil War. In addition, Harding called for “One-Hundred Percent Americanism” which stressed the importance of national unity and the desire for Americans to seek one unified identity in order to preserve the country’s spirit and resolve.²² For restrictionist politicians serving in Congress, Harding’s political passiveness and anti-immigrant rhetoric developed into a desirable combination for enacting the types of policies they sought for decades.

Harding argued that the central problem facing immigrants who recently settled in the United States was their failure to put America first. Again, the issue of maintaining American stability following international conflict persisted as President Harding argued that the America’s open door policy on immigration needed to work more effectively in order to create a stable new citizenry. Various political leaders followed Harding’s lead in emphasizing a strong sense of nationalism and advocating the slogan “America First.”

²⁰ Shanks, *Immigration and Politics*, 91.

²¹ Hans Vought, *The Bully Pulpit and the Melting Pot: American Presidents and the Immigrant, 1897-1933*, (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2004), 155.

²² Vought, *The Bully Pulpit*, 155.

As Harding noted in a campaign speech, “The United States is 100 percent American today, and we mean to hold it henceforth and forever.”²³ Harding advanced the notion of “Americanism” by arguing that racial groups should drop the various hyphens when self-identifying with an ethnic group. He went even further by stating that failing to drop hyphens by ethnic groups could lead to American power being delivered into the control of a foreign capital abroad.²⁴

Harding’s statements on racial exclusion provide insight on how policymakers and political leaders viewed differences over ethnicity and race in a time when restriction gained momentum. Harding agreed with exclusionary policies targeted towards Asians by stating “there is abundant evidence of the dangers which lurk in racial differences.”²⁵ His remarks demonstrated the desire for strong nationalistic identity following an international conflict, which devoted much of America’s attention and resources overseas. These growing nationalistic concerns and desire to ensure government security and stability equated to immigration reforms touted by the restrictionists. Not only did restrictionists have a footing in the legislative arena, but now gained a strong presence to advance their agenda in the executive branch. Clearly, the emphasis on returning to “Americanism” gained traction throughout the post-war period in the United States, which directly impacted government policies on immigration throughout the 1920s and beyond.

Prior to President-elect Harding’s swearing in ceremony in March 1921, a proposal that incorporated elements of the national origins system was introduced into Congress at the end of the Wilson Administration. What became known as the 1921

²³ Vought, *The Bully Pulpit*, 161.

²⁴ Vought, *The Bully Pulpit*, 166.

²⁵ Vought, *The Bully Pulpit*, 164.

Immigration Act was presented as an emergency effort to impose the quota system by Republican Senator William Dillingham, who formerly headed the United States Immigration Commission known as the “Dillingham Commission.” Under Dillingham’s leadership, the Commission concluded that immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe posed a serious threat to American culture and should therefore be reduced.²⁶ The legislation passed both houses of Congress, but President Wilson doomed the bill through a pocket veto.²⁷ While Wilson had publically supported the “reasonable” exclusion of certain races that were deemed “unable to assimilate,” he previously vetoed two comprehensive immigration bills in 1915 and 1917 because they included a controversial literacy test for immigrants over the age of 16.²⁸ Although Wilson and the Democratic Party took a more cautious stance on immigration restriction during this time, it is likely that Wilson’s previous stances on immigration reform influenced his pocket veto.²⁹ However, a similar piece of legislation was introduced in 1921 that came to President Harding’s desk for his signature on May 29, 1921.³⁰ The new law, also a temporary act, was meant as a “quick fix” to the overarching issues related to immigration.

For legislators, the law was meant to address the problem immediately while various issues could be sorted out and dealt with over a longer period of time. The new act set a yearly annual numerical immigration ceiling of 358,000 immigrants, which was

²⁶ “Dillingham Commission (1907-1910)” Harvard University Open Collections Program, accessed April 22, 2012, <http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/dillingham.html>

²⁷ Vought, *The Bully Pulpit*, 153.

²⁸ Donald Wolfensberger, “Congress and the Immigration Dilemma: Is a Solution in Sight?” Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, (March 2007), 11.

²⁹ Vought, *The Bully Pulpit*, 153.

³⁰ Robert H. Ferrell, “Immigration and the Red Scare,” in *Who Belongs in America?: Presidents, Rhetoric, and Immigration*, e.d. Vanessa B. Beasley (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2006), 144.

the first time that a numerical ceiling on immigration had been imposed.³¹ Amongst the 358,000 immigrants allowed to enter the United States, the new law set quotas for each nation comprising 3 percent of each European nationality present in the census of 1910.³² Thus, each European country received a cap equal to 3 percent of the persons born there who were living in the United States in 1910, which was the latest available census.³³

However, as previously mentioned, the incomplete, census data which became the basis of the national origins system allowed manipulation by those seeking to continue Nordic dominance. In fact, Joseph Hill, the chief statistician of the Census Bureau of elite, Nordic descent, acknowledged the methodological problems of determining national origins of the native stock white population. Specifically, the history of incomplete census statistics beginning in 1790 caused those working on the national origins issue to rely on a system of surmising. A study conducted by the Census Bureau in 1909 known as *A Century of Population Growth* actually guessed the ethnic origins of the white population based on the surname of each family head, a practice that Hill described as “questionable” due to some surnames being common to more than one country.³⁴ While Hill eventually conducted a new study to determine the nationality of the 1790 white population for national origins quotas, the methods used to determine national origins rested on sophisticated, educated guessing of surname origin by Hill and a team of genealogists.

³¹ Briggs, *Mass Immigration*, 67.

³² Ferrell, “Immigration and the Red Scare,” 144.

³³ Shanks, *Immigration and Politics*, 94.

³⁴ Ngai, “The Architecture of Race”, 78.

The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924

By 1924, Congressman Albert Johnson and United States Senator David Reed introduced companion pieces of legislation to ensure an effective immigration policy and create a consistent system that did not have to be continually renewed such as the temporary act previously approved. Johnson, a Republican, served as chairman of the House Committee on Immigration and emerged as the leading congressional anti-immigrant racist of his time whereas Reed, also a Republican, served as the carrier of the legislation in the U.S. Senate.³⁵ What became known as the Johnson-Reed bill or simply the Immigration Act of 1924, embodied two overarching principles: restricting certain ethnicities through national origin quotas and completely excluding those races deemed ineligible for citizenship.³⁶ Moreover, the comprehensive reforms embodied in quotas and restrictions contained under the 1924 Act introduced an important concept that the law could actually create a category of illegality by labeling those immigrants who did not maintain a legal status under the law as “illegals” or “bandits.”

In terms of the numerical changes from the 1921 Immigration Act, the 1924 Act set an even lower quota of about 150,000 persons a year and each nation covered by law was allotted a minimum quota of 100 persons. Thus the total number available visas each year became 154,277.³⁷ More importantly, the new proposal changed the basis for distributing immigration slots from recent immigrants to the national origins of the entire population.³⁸ The restructuring of the process of determining quotas proved to be a very

³⁵ Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*, 70.

³⁶ Ngai, “The Architecture of Race,” 80

³⁷ Briggs, *Mass Immigration*, 67.

³⁸ Shanks, *Immigration and Politics*, 90.

complex process as determining the national origins of the population of the United States took upwards of five years to actually complete.³⁹

Aside from the continuance of national origin quotas, the 1924 Act is important to consider when examining how the law completely excluded certain races deemed ineligible for assimilation and citizenship. Prior to the 1924 Act, the Chinese Exclusion Act had already excluded Asians from citizenship or by the “barred Asiatic zone” created by Congress in 1917.⁴⁰ While the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 made clear that the Chinese were ineligible to become citizens, the Immigration Act of 1924 codified the principle of racial exclusion of those who were of Asian origin by excluding them from the entire quota system in the first place.⁴¹ Hence, the 1924 Law excluded non-European peoples living in the United States from the population utilized to determine the quotas: those who immigrated from the Western Hemisphere and their descendants, aliens ineligible to citizenship and their descendants, and the descendants of African slaves.⁴² Based on these facts, it is clear that while the 1924 Act utilized quotas to discriminate against immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe such as Italians, the law also promoted the idea of racial categories of non-whites who were non-European and non-eligible for citizenship.

While the exclusion of those of non-European origin represents a startling development in codifying racial categories, the proposed legislation made important changes to the temporary act of 1921. As result of public sentiment that the bill did not support Northern Europeans, many pressed government leaders to amend the law to

³⁹ Briggs, *Mass Immigration*, 67.

⁴⁰ Ngai, “The Architecture of Race”, 80.

⁴¹ Ngai, “The Architecture of Race,” 80-81.

⁴² Ngai, “The Architecture of Race,” 72.

increase Northern European quotas to produce the type of immigrants that were “desirable” to Americans. To ease these concerns, Congress changed the census year for calculating quotas to 1890, which was a time when immigrants were mostly from Northern Europe.⁴³ In addition, Congress reduced the cap of allowable immigrants to 2 percent of European nationalities in that present year. Thus, each European country received a cap equal to 2 percent of the number of persons born abroad but residing in the United States in 1890. However, included in the Act were changes for the use of census allocations that went into effect after 1929; the proportion of the United States residents for each quota would be based on the census of 1920. Moreover, the new act made specific changes to the preference categories for immigrants seeking entrance to the country. Unmarried children under the age of 21, parents and spouses of U.S. citizens over the age of 21 and skilled agricultural workers and their wives and children under the age of 16 were given preference under the legislation in no specific order.⁴⁴

In addition to changes made related to numerical quotas, the 1924 Act introduced the important concept of legislating a category of illegality or banditry. With passage of the new law, those immigrants who had not legally entered the United States under the system of allocated quotas were now considered “illegal immigrants.” Furthermore, the 1924 Act included provisions for deportation and established the Border Patrol. As Mae Ngai notes, “legal and illegal status became, in effect, abstract constructions, having less to do with experience than numbers and paper.”⁴⁵ In other words, the law actually created a new category of persons based on what constituted illegality and the immigration

⁴³ Ferrell, “Immigration and the Red Scare,” 145.

⁴⁴ Shanks, *Immigration and Politics*, 94.

⁴⁵ Ngai, Mae, “The Strange Career,” 73.

system became more rigid by focusing more on numbers and devising an enforcement mechanism to remove these “illegals.” This category of illegality supported notions of illegals having no claims to citizenship and being “stripped of individual personage.” With a new group of illegals with no official legal status residing in the United States, it is not surprising that fears about the “danger” of this group followed.⁴⁶ While restrictionists prevailed and the debate over immigration disappeared for the time being, the immigration question would not fade from the public forum over the next fifty years.

Although Congress acted on immigration issues by passing the Quota Acts, the United States fell into a ravaging economic plight infamously known as the Great Depression by the late 1920s. With skyrocketing unemployment numbers, a fundamental collapse of the American banking system and doubling of tariffs, American political discourse did not overwhelmingly focus on immigration throughout the economic catastrophe or in the immediate years preceding World War II. With the outbreak of World War II in 1939, global migration of voluntary immigrants and refugees came to another near standstill just as it had done so throughout the First World War two decades earlier. Moreover, even if immigration was possible during this time period, many potential immigrants felt no desire to relocate to the United States due to the economic conditions; it was not sensible for immigrants to leave their home country, which equally experienced economic misfortune as America.⁴⁷

When Europe began its next war, Americans remained poised not to commit similar mistakes of the past, specifically, entering another costly European War. Groups

⁴⁶ Ngai, Mae, “The Strange Career,” 77-78.

⁴⁷ Shanks, *Immigration and Politics*, 100.

seeking refuge in the United States were met with apprehension from government leaders and the general public. In a *Fortune* poll from 1938, 86 percent of respondents were opposed to political refugees entering the country.⁴⁸ Government leaders, who would later express public remorse, denounced the possible entrance of refugees from Germany. Many believed that allowing refugees from Germany would open up the floodgates for other oppressed groups who wanted to escape repressive regimes and wartime conditions.

These were not the only concerns related to refugees. Fear spread that allowing European refugees would destroy the fabric of American democracy and destabilize the country because European ideologies were not fully consistent with American democratic values. The United States could not put itself at risk to the mercy of fascists, communists and anarchists in a time of international uncertainty. America reverted to isolationism to avoid entering World War II and the possibility of opening the country's gates to refugees made the United States all more susceptible to "Europe's War."

As Europe descended toward World War II, ideology continued to remain a visible force for restricting immigration policy. Although ethnic and racial considerations still remained important during this period, as the Japanese internment demonstrated, on a strategic level, the problems sparked in World War II were increasingly viewed as ideological rather than ethnic: America's ties to the Allied cause were based on defeating aggressive fascism. After examining the causes for World War II, the United States viewed fascism and then communism as the sources of European tension and conflict. Moreover, the United States believed anarchists, radicals and those not aligned with

⁴⁸ Shanks, *Immigration and Politics*, 103.

democracy were malignant threats to the well being of the country and detrimental to the stability of democratic institutions.

While the Allies defeated the Axis Powers, communism emerged as the menacing threat to the United States as President Truman proclaimed, “Communist tyranny has taken up where Hitler’s brutality left off.”⁴⁹ Communism became the principal threat to the survival of nations that allied with the United States against the Soviet Union, which were vital to the foreign policy of the United States following the war. The threats that communism posed to America on the world stage did not end with foreign policy matters. The spread of communism and other radical ideologies threatened the domestic strength of democracy in America as well with fears of the Fifth Column and the possibility that communists could infiltrate the United States.

Instead of a direct military conflict, the United States became entrenched in an ideological battle against the Soviet Union. Conversely, the immigration debate that emerged in the post-World War II era refocused the nation’s attention on the activity of immigrants for very different reasons. Similar to the overarching struggle waged against communist ideology through foreign policy and military operations, government leaders engaged in a campaign against immigrants based on their political leanings and ideological perspectives. The Cold War thus had a profound impact on immigration policies in the United States and restrictionist advocates reemerged in the legislative arena to dominate the political dialogue and control the lawmaking agenda.

⁴⁹ Shanks, *Immigration and Politics*, 112.

The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952

Overpopulation, economic malaise and the destruction of vital infrastructure across Europe following the Second World War became obstacles to maintaining political stability and economic viability. Preventing potential instability across Western Europe became crucial to maintain governments allied with the United States against the growing threat of communism. Moreover, many members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization aligned politically with the United States began urging American government officials to accept refugees to relieve the tensions of overpopulation. Truman began publically acknowledging the growing problem of overpopulation and the large-scale destruction of social infrastructure in Western Europe and urged the American public to help prevent a disintegration of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.⁵⁰ Specifically, President Truman advocated that America could benefit from accepting new immigrants from Western Europe, both immigrants who voluntarily desired to leave their country of origin and refugees who sought to migrate to the United States for other reasons. Truman argued that by accepting new immigrants, the United States could expand its productivity while simultaneously assisting its European allies.

Truman and other internationalist political leaders urged the American public to consider changing its views on immigration policy because the nation's crucial allies in the battle against communism and the Soviet Union were at risk. Again, ideological fault lines continued to hold prominence with the advent of the Cold War and not all political leaders agreed with Truman's urgent calls. In fact, the same group of restrictionist leaders reemerged to battle the internationalist's newfound agenda. Democratic Senator Pat

⁵⁰ Shanks, *Immigration and Politics*, 126.

McCarran, chair of the Senate Immigration Committee, argued against Truman's policies and felt that those who favored the liberalization of immigration policies actually aided the communist cause.⁵¹ Like previous immigration critics, McCarran argued that liberalized immigration policies would allow the Soviet Union to infiltrate the country and destabilize American life through communist subversives. With the Korean invasion in 1950, anticommunist restrictionists gained the evidence they needed in order to persuade the American public that liberalizing immigration laws posed a menacing danger.⁵² Following the commencement of the Korean War, liberals and restrictionists each proposed a new law to completely overhaul American immigration policy.

The Humphrey-Lehman Act advanced by liberals intended to abolish all discrimination on the bases of race and sex and replace it with a system of established preference categories based on family members, refugee status and worker skills. On the other hand, the McCarran-Walter Act kept the national origin quota system intact and continued its reliance on the 1920 census. The McCarran-Walter Act, championed by restrictionists, reaffirmed the Quota Acts but revised them in two ways. First, the legislation established a Chinese quota and a single Asian quota, which represented a change from the 1924 Act that completely banned all aliens ineligible for citizenship that included Asian immigrants. Secondly, the bill would change immigration policy by including strict anti-communist provisions. The McCarran-Walter Act specified a list of communist-leaning organizations any immigrant who in the past or presently identified

⁵¹ Shanks, *Immigration and Politics*, 127.

⁵² Shanks, *Immigration and Politics*, 132.

with, or was suspected of aligning with these groups were automatically banned from entering the country.⁵³

Liberal opponents argued that the bill epitomized a xenophobic and anti-immigrant America while the bill's sponsors vehemently defended the legislation's ability to preserve American stability in a time of great ideological rift in the world. On May 22, 1952 the Senate passed the bill by a voice vote and on June 10, 1952 the House of Representatives also passed it by a vote of 203-53. Setting up a heated political battle, President Truman vetoed the bill on June 25, 1952 on the grounds that the bill would be detrimental to the strength of NATO and harmful in combating the rise of the Soviet Union. Striking back and revealing the bill's overwhelming support, Congress successfully voted to override the President's veto and the bill became law.

As will be seen in the next chapter, immigrant groups and those singled out by the McCarran-Walter Act did not sit by idly and accept the repercussions of this new immigration policy. Mutual aid societies, immigrant-advocacy groups and others began a heavy lobbying campaign to overturn these restrictionist and discriminatory policies. Namely, the Italian community in Chicago worked to assist newly arriving immigrants and to amend immigration laws to allow more refugees to enter the United States. The American Committee on Italian Migration and the Order of the Sons of Italy worked aggressively to lobby Congress and the executive branch for the abolition of origin quotas, which greatly disadvantaged Italians who both lived in the United States and who sought entrance to America.

⁵³ Shanks, *Immigration and Politics*, 133-135.

Chapter 2. –Translating Righteous Indignation into Action: The Italian Community’s Response

“People from the fine northern countries, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, England, Ireland and Wales are no longer coming to our shores. They are wonderful, clean, vice-free class of people which we need in our America of the future but these people do not come to our country anymore...soon the fine strain of American people will become extinct and *I doubt in 50 years whether the better class will even want to live in this country.*”

-Quote from a letter to George Spatuzza, Chair of the Chicago Chapter of the Order of Sons of Italy in America from Mary Ryan, a concerned Chicagoan (Dated: November 25, 1953)

From 1900 onward, immigrant groups and mutual aid societies provided social support for ethnic communities while engaging in political efforts in their favor. Chapter two first describes immigrant mutual aid societies in the twentieth century then explores two mutual aid societies, the American Committee on Italian Migration (ACIM) and the Order of the Sons of Italy, that offer the primary sources for my work. I review the history of and founding of these committees and examine their social and political functions. Comparing the overarching political feelings toward immigration in both the 1920s and 1950s, I note that the context of the Civil Rights Movement and Cold War offered the Italian community a more favorable climate to amend immigration policies rather than the nativist feelings discussed in the previous chapter. Moreover, this chapter explores how the ACIM became politically active in working to “prove” their strength by carrying out the provisions of existing law in order to pass new legislation in their favor, namely the Refugee Relief Act of 1953. As the ACIM lobbied Congress for favorable policy changes and rallied their members to take action, these methods provided political advocacy for Italians that may have contributed to their evolving racial status. While Italians contributed to the passage of the Refugee Act, their ultimate goal remained the removal of national origin quotas, which relegated their ethnic status as undesirable.

As immigrants flowed into the United States during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, America's spirit of volunteerism and cooperation gave rise to thousands of mutual aid societies and supported preexisting aid organizations that assisted and integrated ethnic communities. Their members included those both native born and immigrants and provided a familiar atmosphere where ethnic communities could express native customs and traditions without fear of isolating their position in American society. Specifically, Italian mutual aid societies flourished and maintained strong bonds between Italians in America due to the close village ties found across the Italian peninsula. Moreover, the strength and endurance of Italian mutual aid societies can be traced to the fact many Italians immigrants belonged to similar mutual benefit and welfare organizations in their native land.⁵⁴ Naturally, these aid organizations followed Italian immigrants just as other customs were brought to America. Thus, Italian mutual aid societies that formed in the United States served as spheres of social interaction and as places of shared consciousness that assisted rural Italians in adjusting to industrialized, urban life.

Found in nearly every Italian community, these societies were pervasive in the United States as well. New York City alone had over 2,000 Italian mutual aid organizations during the twentieth century.⁵⁵ While Italian benefit societies served as places of socialization and mutual welfare, as time went on they championed political agendas aimed at counteracting discriminatory policies. After surveying potential mutual aid societies, I chose to study two particular organizations that spanned the twentieth

⁵⁴ Historical Summary, The Spatuzza, George J., 1896-1979. Papers, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

⁵⁵ Historical Summary, The Spatuzza, George J., 1896-1979. Papers, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

century in the same geographic location in order to more fully understand how these types of organizations operated.

These organizations active in Chicago provide several advantages because Chicago, along with Philadelphia and New York City, served as one of the three great destinations of Italian immigrants throughout the twentieth century.⁵⁶ Italians had immigrated to the mid-western metropolis in large numbers beginning in the 1880s and established several Italian neighborhoods and “areas” that extended throughout the city.⁵⁷ Chicago’s reputation as an industrial center, railroad hub and as the fastest growing city in America during the early twentieth century attracted Italians who sought jobs in the region’s numerous factories, mines, railroads and construction projects.⁵⁸ By 1920 alone, the Italian population reached approximately 60,000. The two mutual aid societies utilized in this case study conducted their social and political activities from their national headquarters in New York City and across state and local chapters across the country.

While leaders of the American Committee on Italian Migration founded the organization in the later part of the twentieth century in response to political and social needs, the Order of the Sons of Italy in America (OSIA) had its origins in the earlier period of the twentieth century. The OSIA’s founder, Dr. Vincenzo Sellaro was born in Palermo, Sicily in 1868 and attended medical school at the University of Naples before arriving in the United States in 1897. Sellaro became Chief Gynecologist at the Italian Hospital in New York City of which he was a founder. Emerging as a leader within the large Italian community in New York City, Sellaro recognized the need to unite the

⁵⁶ Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*, 11.

⁵⁷ Rudolph Vecoli, *Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of the Uprooted*, (The Journal of American History, 1964), 408.

⁵⁸ Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*, 16.

multitude of Italian mutual aid societies that flourished across the city. Calling together a group of Italian professionals and community leaders, he established the Order of the Sons of Italy in America in June 1905.⁵⁹

As the numerous Italian mutual aid societies united under a single federation, Sellaro and members of the OSIA established a clear framework of goals for the organization including reuniting into “one single family” all the Italians scattered throughout the Americas, promoting moral and intellectual betterment among Italians and spreading among the members of the Order the conviction that participating in American political life was a factor of social betterment. Moreover, the organization outlined the desire to preserve the Italian language and culture and to provide welfare to those in need. However, the OSIA placed special emphasis on their last goal:

To champion all those causes that can contribute to infusing the conviction that the Italian has gifts of mind and heart, which make him worthy of consideration not only as a valuable worker, but also as an effective factor of progress and social greatness.⁶⁰

This final goal reveals not only the strong sense of pride the OSIA took in their ethnic origins, but demonstrates the desire of Italians to be accepted by American society as productive and useful individuals who could contribute to American greatness in time periods such as the 1920s in which society found Italians to be ethnically and morally undesirable. As the OSIA set forth its goals, the organization worked at length to recruit new members and establish new lodges. After the first few years of being founded, the OSIA organized additional lodges in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Ohio and

⁵⁹ Historical Summary, The Spatuzza, George J., 1896-1979. Papers, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

⁶⁰ Historical Summary, The Spatuzza, George J., 1896-1979. Papers, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

Washington, D.C. Between 1910 and 1919 the Order expanded rapidly and founded 960 lodges across North America. By 1918, the OSIA proudly included 125,000 members in 24 states and 2 Canadian provinces.⁶¹

During World War I, the OSIA provided subsidies to the families of members who served in the war and the Order contributed nearly two million dollars and four million lire (former Italian currency) for the family of war victims in the United States and in Italy. After the War, the Order continued to grow and assist Italians both socially and politically. The OSIA established orphanages, provided welfare assistance to Italians and taught English to newly arriving Italians. From a political perspective, the organization concentrated on its political goals by forging a working relationship with the Executive Branch from Presidents Wilson to Reagan and by presenting the names of qualified Italians to congressional and cabinet members for appointed government positions. Furthermore, the Order successfully lobbied Congress to establish Columbus Day as a national holiday and to declare the 75th Anniversary of the founding of the OSIA as “National Italian American Day” in 1981.⁶² Such political engagement undoubtedly assisted Italians in transforming their racial status from non-white to white. In similar manner to Irish immigrants who utilized an “ethnic strategy” of promoting Irish solidarity in order to gain political power while dominating blue-collar occupations, Italians unified through mutual aid societies such as the OSIA to benefit their community and lobby for political inclusion.⁶³ However, it should be noted that the collection left

⁶¹ Historical Summary, The Spatuzza, George J., 1896-1979. Papers, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

⁶² Historical Summary, The Spatuzza, George J., 1896-1979. Papers, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

⁶³ Ronald Takaki, “A Different Mirror,” in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, e.d. Maurianne Adams et al, (Routledge: New York, 2000) 69.

behind by the OSIA details general accomplishments of the organization whereas the American Committee on Italian Migration collection contains very extensive records of all their activities. Thus, more focus is placed on the ACIM due to the completeness of their collection and because the ACIM focused more directly on changing immigration policy.

The ACIM originated as a result of a Chicago meeting called at the request of the National Catholic Resettlement Council (NCRC) in October 1951. With the economic struggle and the massive destruction of social infrastructure in Italy and other Western European nations in the aftermath of World War II nations, the Chicago gathering served to discuss barriers preventing the immigration of more Italians who could ameliorate the shortage of special, skilled workers in the United States. The Archbishop of Chicago, Samuel Cardinal Stritch convened the ACIM to solve these problems. It officially launched in February 1952 with the national headquarters serving in New York City and with Juvenal Marchisio becoming the ACIM's national chairman. Marchisio would become the most important figure in establishing the organization's national operations and activities.⁶⁴ The Chicago Chapter, organized and founded in May 1952 during the controversial debates on the McCarran-Walter Act, consisted of priests, laymen, local Italian leaders and others from the Chicago area and together they created an official monthly newspaper called the ACIM Dispatch to inform members of objectives and events.⁶⁵ The ACIM maintained a Ladies Division and worked with the National Conference of Catholic Women to provide material and social assistance to newly

⁶⁴ Battisti, "The American Committee on Italian Migration," 18.

⁶⁵ Collection Guide, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

arriving immigrants. As Battisti explains, “these groups collected donations of clothing, shoes, household items, furniture, and groceries to distribute to arriving families in need.”⁶⁶ Based on correspondences and collection documents, the ACIM collaborated with immigrants, community members, businesses and other organizations with no preference for a particular social status or gender and with interaction that crossed class boundaries. Hence, this organization should not be considered a male group that served the sole interests of one constituency.

The ACIM formed to publicize the need for Italian migration and to assist immigrants with housing, social life and employment. Moreover, the organization devoted itself to political causes affecting Italian communities in the wake of new restrictions passed in the 1950s. Prior to the ACIM’s founding and organizing against the McCarran-Walter Act, the Italian community in Chicago unsuccessfully attempted to block efforts to pass the 1924 Act. Chicago’s two main Italian-language newspapers, *L’Italia* and *La Tribuna Italiana Transatlantica* showcased numerous articles and editorials denouncing restriction and organized a letter writing campaign aimed at reaching members of Congress. Italian institutions such as the Italian Chamber of Commerce and the Order of Sons of Italy tried to counteract anti-Southern European sentiment by stressing the hardworking contributions that Italians could make to the American identity.⁶⁷ Furthermore, local Italian groups formed a coalition—the Chicago Committee of American Citizens of Italian Extraction (CCACIE)—to defeat the Johnson-Reed Act.

⁶⁶ Battisti, “The American Committee on Italian Migration,” 23.

⁶⁷ Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*, 71.

However, with the political tide overwhelmingly in favor of restriction, this coalition of diverse Italian groups and interests did not succeed in persuading Congress that Italians should not be discriminated against under federal law.⁶⁸ Despite these earlier attempts by the Italian community to organize against immigration restriction, the ACIM realized the opportunity to oppose restriction during a time when civil rights and policy changes toward minorities was gaining traction. The differences between the decade of the 1920s and the late 1950s should be noted because they offered differing opportunities for Italian organizations to influence legal changes that affected their racial status and ability to immigrate. Unlike the period of the 1920s in which fierce nativism swept the country and overwhelmed efforts by Italians to oppose the Quota Acts, the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, in which both whites and minorities spoke out against discrimination and gained increased legal rights, contributed to greater Italian success in lobbying Congress and the Executive Branch. Furthermore, it must be noted that Cold War liberalism created a more favorable environment for ethnicities seeking less restrictive immigration policies. In a time when the United States emerged as a superpower and engaged in a fight against communism, American immigration policies and specifically the national origins quotas were seen as hypocrisy. If the United States sought to win over the “hearts and minds” of the world and highlight the stark differences between democracy and communism, immigration policy based on racial exclusion and ethnic discrimination needed to be changed.

Moreover, President Kennedy’s role in supporting civil rights legislation by the 1960s created an environment in which Italians could have a greater ability to contribute

⁶⁸ Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*, 69.

to reforms as racial discrimination became linked with ethnic discrimination found under national origins quotas. Otis Graham explains this link by stating, “In the context of the Cold War and the Civil Rights struggle, there seemed considerably more energy and pertinence in the reformers’ arguments. The national origins system was on the defensive now, ironically joined at the hip with Jim Crow.”⁶⁹ While the Italian community recognized the opportunity for immigration reform as the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum, it should be noted that not all Southern and Eastern Europeans overtly supported new civil rights legislation advanced by African Americans.⁷⁰

Overall, the ACIM primarily wanted to promote emergency legislation that would permit more Italians to enter the United States and to work toward the revision of the McCarran-Walter Act.⁷¹ The records and correspondence included in the ACIM Chicago Chapter collection illustrate the ways in which the organization aided Italian immigrants and forged working relationships with many U.S. Senators and Representatives to amend immigration laws. Summarizing the importance of the ACIM in unifying the Italian community during this period, Battisti describes the organization as, “the largest, most active, and politically significant Italian organization in the 1950s and 1960s.”⁷² In addition, the ACIM actively worked with other Catholic organizations and Italian groups to promote the liberalization of immigration quotas. The ACIM took

⁶⁹ Otis L. Graham Jr., *Unguarded Gates: A History of America's Immigration Crisis*, (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 89.

⁷⁰ For the purposes of this thesis, I argue that the Civil Rights Movement offered, in general, a more favorable environment in which Italians could produce immigration reforms that would benefit Eastern and Southern Europeans. I do not want to imply that Italian activists allied themselves with the African American community, which was not typically the case. Instead, I believe that immigration reform became a smaller “theater” of Civil Rights Movement, especially with the push for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

⁷¹ Collection Guide, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

⁷² Battisti, “The American Committee on Italian Migration,” 18.

the leading role in directing the efforts of the Italian Welfare League and the National Catholic Welfare Conference, especially in legislative campaigns and lobbying efforts.⁷³ Thus, the ACIM's efforts show that the organization was fully devoted to both social and political purposes and allying itself with other organizations that would advance the standing of Italian-Americans and Italian immigrants – people in the first half of the twentieth century who did not qualify as “fully American.”

While some may question the relevance of observing the early history of these Italian mutual aid organizations, understanding the origins of these committees and the circumstances in which they operated is important when examining the social and political hurdles facing immigrants at the time. The documents included in the collections of these Italian benefit organizations, stress the strong social assistance these groups provided to newly arriving Italian immigrants in America and overseas. Both the OSIA and ACIM worked extensively to recruit local Italian Americans to “adopt” arriving Italian immigrants and assist them in adjusting to a new life. Acquiring sponsors and assurances for newly arriving immigrants emerged as one of the most important aspects of these committees and was required by federal immigration law at the time. Assurances for immigrants took the form of finding a sponsor, usually a U.S. citizen, who could assist immigrants in finding employment, housing and financial stability. Thus, Italian mutual aid societies utilized their vast networks, many overlapping with close-knit, localized Italian communities, to provide the necessary assurances, which tested their strength and organizational abilities as social institutions.

⁷³ Battisti, “The American Committee on Italian Migration,” 18.

With strict requirements under the McCarran-Walter Act, the committees needed to arouse enthusiasm amongst their many members and keep them informed through letter writing. Throughout the ACIM's effort to amend the McCarran-Walter Act, the leaders of the ACIM sent a letter to all its local organizations urging members to take action and a letter from 1956 reveals the extent to which these committees went to provide social assistance. The ACIM national headquarters explained that sponsoring an immigrant included finding permanent housing, providing transportation from the rail station to appropriate housing and helping the person to find employment. ACIM leaders asked locals to secure donations of appliances, furniture, refrigerators, bed linens and cooking utensils.

Moreover, the letter explained that adoptees should educate immigrants on how to use these appliances and how to navigate around the city in which they settled.⁷⁴ Further demonstrating the social assistance provided by these Italian benefit organizations, the letter from July 1956 instructed members to take new immigrants to the Social Security office for a Social Security Card and to introduce them to local church leaders and nurseries if they had children. Similar correspondences instruct members of local organizations to assist Italians in finding language classes in order for these Italians to adequately learn English. These letters demonstrate the length these committees went to ensure that immigrants would be comfortable and integrated in the communities in which they settled.

⁷⁴ Letter to Local Chapters, 12 July 1956, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

The ACIM continued to carry out its duty by distributing newsletters and pamphlets to newly arriving Italian immigrants. One of the most interesting items found amongst the collection is a pamphlet titled “Welcome to the USA: Benvenuto in America.” The pamphlet, written in Italian, was handed out to recent immigrants who could not read or write the English language and explained the functions of the ACIM. Moreover, the pamphlet emphasized the restrictive nature of American immigration law and how the new immigrants should work hard to become good American citizens. The pamphlet encouraged Italians to enroll in English classes and obtain an education in order to fully experience a well-developed social, spiritual and civic life in their new communities.⁷⁵ Observing the pamphlet shows that even though ACIM leaders wanted to preserve the heritage of Italian immigrants, they strongly encouraged refugees to learn English and become “good citizens.” In this respect, the work of mutual aid societies became dualistic: promoting the Italian identity while encouraging the ideals of American citizenry. The concept of “good citizenry” is especially interesting under the context of the Cold War period and even in earlier times. The need for immigrations of “good citizenry” during these times meant that these immigrants should contribute to the American Way rather than becoming public charges of society.

The ACIM not only reached out to its devoted members for vital social assistance, but also sought the support of local businesses and corporations. The Chicago Chapter of the ACIM appealed to various businesses, including those operated by Italians and non-Italians, for donations in the form of money, appliances and job assurances. In a

⁷⁵ “Benvenuto in America” Pamphlet, ca. 1965. The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

letter dated June 2, 1956, the Chicago ACIM wrote to Polk Brothers, a local merchandise store, seeking appliances and furniture donations. The letter explained the reasoning behind the committee's request stating, "Our committee is engaged in the difficult work of resettlement of Italian refugees who arrive in Chicago every week. Most of them are very poor and are unable to buy the necessary furnishings for the apartment we manage to find for them." The Chicago ACIM continued by requesting 25 used refrigerators, 30 used gas ranges, 20 used washing machines, 25 tables and chairs for kitchens and other household items.⁷⁶ While it remains unknown whether the local business provided all of the requested items, the tone of the letter insinuated that an agreement had been established or would be as the letter closed, "thanking you in advance for your good deed."⁷⁷

Further demonstrating how the ACIM forged relationships with local business for social assistance, an additional letter revealed how businesses could secure jobs for Italian refugees. In a letter dated November 30, 1955 a local man named Walter Persegati wrote to the ACIM stating that he could provide 150 job assurances to Italian immigrants who specialized in tailoring or who were willing to learn the trade. Persegati had already given 60 job assurances to Italian refugees after being solicited by the ACIM.⁷⁸ Another letter dated March 20, 1954 came from a local candy store called Ferrara Candy Co. and stated that they had budgeted \$100 to donate to the ACIM's national headquarters, "such

⁷⁶Letter to Polk Brothers, 2 June 1956, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

⁷⁷Letter to Polk Brothers, 2 June 1956, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

⁷⁸Letter to ACIM from Walter Persegati, 30 November 1955, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

a worthy cause.”⁷⁹ Examining the communication between leaders of the ACIM and members of local businesses shows that Italian mutual aid societies went beyond their membership and ethnic communities in order to involve the wider community to raise awareness of the difficulties facing poor refugees who arrived homeless and jobless in the United States. The ACIM was successfully able to involve a wider community in their cause by reaching out to these local businesses and institutions through an extensive network of letter writing, which raised such awareness and brought attention to those in need. Furthermore, involving the wider community accomplished secondary goals of proving to Americans that Italians embodied hardworking values and contributed to American prosperity.

Although these committees provided social assistance to Italians living in America, the ACIM and OSIA also devoted attention to social welfare causes in Italy. In a letter from the Chicago Chapter of the ACIM, the national headquarters sent out a letter to local chapters launching an effort to collect funds for flood victims in Italy. Dated November 26, 1966, the national ACIM stated, “Let us all rally behind this worthy cause. If every Italian contributes a few dollars each, we could send a significant contribution to the Italian government for the victims of this major catastrophe.”⁸⁰ Moreover, in an additional letter addressed to officers of the ACIM chapters, the national leadership stated that a special return envelope for donations would be available to all readers of the ACIM Dispatch.

⁷⁹ Letter to ACIM from Ferrara Candy Co., 20 March 1954, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

⁸⁰ Letter from ACIM to Local Chapters 26 November 1966, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

The OSIA took on similar endeavors by aiding relief victims of natural disasters in Italy starting in 1914 when the National Headquarters donated funds to earthquake victims in Sicily. The OSIA followed the ACIM by launching a campaign to aid the Italians who experienced the massive floods during the late 1960s.⁸¹ The desire of the ACIM and OSIA to solicit donations for natural disaster victims in Italy reveals the social aims of these organizations did not end with assisting Italians in America, but encompassed transnational goals of supporting Italians at home and abroad. The social services that the ACIM and OSIA provided to Italian immigrants shows the strength of Italian mutual aid societies and commitment to assisting Italians in both the United States and in Italy.

When considering the social role that Italian mutual aid societies served, the collections demonstrate that their activities were not constrained to teaching English and preserving the Italian identity. The organizations took advantage of their strong, national and local networks to secure donations varying from household appliances to job assurances. In seeking social assistance, these committees urged local businesses outside of their ethnic communities to support poor refugees by giving anything they could to assist disadvantaged Italian immigrants. Furthermore, the work of these committees permeated transnational boundaries by aiding the victims of natural disasters in Italy through the solicitation of monetary donations from its committed members. As the social role of these institutions provided crucial aid to the Italian cause, the ACIM and OSIA began concentrating on political causes that favorably affected their position under federal law.

⁸¹ Historical Summary, The Spatuzza, George J., 1896-1979. Papers, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

The ACIM and OSIA: Early Political Organizing and Lobbying Congress to Change Federal Law

As discussed in the previous chapter, the McCarran-Walter Act, championed by restrictionists, reaffirmed the Quota Acts and introduced new provisions concerning ideological leanings of immigrants. Specifically, the legislation identified a list of communist-leaning organizations with which any immigrants who past or presently identified or was suspected of aligning with these groups were automatically banned from entering the country.⁸² The legislation divided liberals and restrictionists as both groups debated whether the legislation went too far in limiting the flow of immigration into the United States.

With the enactment of the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, immigrant communities across the United States did not waiver in the face of this highly restrictive and closed-door federal immigration law. In fact, the Italian community did just the opposite. Despite a intimidating task ahead, Italians organized and formed immigrant groups such as the American Committee on Italian Migration and the new federal immigration laws served as a vehicle for mobilizing Italian mutual aid societies angered by the discriminatory policies of McCarran-Walter. When the ACIM established its headquarters in 1952, two of the main goals of the committee were “to promote emergency legislation that will permit a number of Italians to enter the United States” and “to work toward the revision of McCarran-Walter, which is unfair to certain countries.”⁸³ Thus, immigrant organizations such as the ACIM made the revision and repeal of McCarran-Walter one of their principal goals. With these bold objectives, the ACIM

⁸² Shanks, *Immigration and politics*, 133-135.

⁸³ Collection Guide, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

needed to develop strong political ties and build a savvy political network in order to successfully lobby Congress for an outcome that would favor Italian immigrants.

However, the ACIM and its leaders understood that they needed to act strategically and began by advocating emergency legislation to allow refugees from countries affected by the destruction of social infrastructure following World War II, unfortunate natural disasters and discrimination under immigration federal laws, namely Italy, Greece and Spain. With advancing this less grand agenda first rather than a full scale repeal of McCarran-Walter, the ACIM positioned itself to develop effective political strategies while still working towards the admittance of more Italian immigrants under an already restrictive system. Facing European overpopulation in the aftermath of World War II, President Dwight D. Eisenhower publically supported legislation that could allow refugees into the United States from the unused quotas under the McCarran-Walter Act.⁸⁴

While less is known about the activities of the OSIA during this time, the ACIM waged a full-scale effort to publically promote and support such refugee legislation as a means for allowing more Italian immigrants into the United States. The Chicago chapter of the ACIM began to establish contacts with the Illinois congressional delegation and bring the importance of emergency relief legislation to the attention of these federal legislators. Moreover, the ACIM utilized its network of members by encouraging them to contact their legislators and updating ACIM members by publishing their progress in the ACIM Dispatch.

⁸⁴ President Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Special Message to the Congress Recommending Amendments to the Refugee Relief Act," 27 May 1955, *Immigration Daily*, <http://www.ilw.com/articles/2004,0105-eisenhower.shtml> (accessed 30 January 2012).

The Refugee Relief Act of 1953

The Refugee Relief Act of 1953 emerged as the answer to the ACIM's calls for allowing more Italians to enter the United States and easing the restrictions against certain countries. By taking advantage of unused quotas from Northern European countries, such as Germany and Austria, the Relief Act served as Congress' response to President Eisenhower's plea for legislation to alleviate the problems associated with natural disasters, inadequate social infrastructure and overpopulation in Europe. Specifically, the legislation provided for the admission of over 214,000 refugees over a period of three years (expired December 31, 1956) and included provisions requiring that every applicant for a visa have an assurance of employment, housing and that they would not become a public charge to the United States.⁸⁵

The Refugee Act became especially important to the ACIM and the Italian community because of the provision that allocated 60,000 visas to Italians who had relatives in America and who were refugees. Hence, more Italians could have the possibility of immigrating to the United States without being restricted by national origin quotas. With major political debate put aside because of the ongoing refugee crisis in Europe, the legislation passed Congress and was signed into law by President Eisenhower in August 1953.⁸⁶

After the excitement settled within the Italian community that more Italians could enter the United States, organizations such as the ACIM faced a challenging endeavor.

⁸⁵ Letter from ACIM to Local Chapters 15 March 1954, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

⁸⁶ Letter from ACIM to Local Chapters 5 May 1955, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

Within a period of just three years, sixty thousand Italian refugees needed assurances in the form of housing, employment and the guarantee that they would become law-abiding citizens. The consequences of failing to fulfill the assurance requirements and to bring all sixty thousand Italians to United States would be detrimental to future efforts by the Italian community to ease strict quota requirements enforced by federal law. In other words, if the Italian community could not successfully meet the assurance and sponsor requirements then it would convey the message to political leaders that it would be futile to remove quotas limiting Italian immigration. In a letter that embodies the urgent tone of the campaign, Caesar Donanzan who worked at the ACIM's headquarters stated:

It's up to you now! Yes, if you have ever so much as entertained a thought that the immigration policies of the United States are discriminatory and biased against the immigration of certain aliens, including Italians, *it's up to you to translate righteous indignation into action...* These people turn to we Americans of Italian descent for this opportunity. We must not let them down.⁸⁷

Moreover, the Italian community realized that if they failed to provide assurances to the allotted sixty thousand refugees, it might negatively impact legislative efforts to end quotas in the future. In a letter dated March 14, 1954, the national headquarters of the ACIM implored local chapters to do anything and everything in their power to ensure the successful coordination of the Refugee Relief Act of 1953. The letter stated, "The necessity of bringing this program to a successful conclusion before the end of 1956 is of paramount importance to us, a Member Agency of the National Catholic Resettlement Council, and will favorably affect future legislation."⁸⁸ Hence, by carrying out the

⁸⁷ Letter from ACIM to Local Chapters 5 May 1955, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

⁸⁸ Letter from ACIM to Local Chapters 14 May 1954, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

provisions of the legislation, the Italian community had the opportunity to prove on the national stage that Italian immigrants embodied industrious and upstanding qualities that contributed to the allure of the United States.

Recognizing the stakes at hand, the ACIM began a massive effort to ensure the successful coordination of the bill's provisions. The organization issued numerous letters with local chapters applying appropriate pressure and urging the recruitment of job and housing assurances. Understanding the unique labor requirements specific to areas of the country became especially prominent in the efforts to carry out the provisions of the act. National officials went at length to collaborate with localities to collect information on employment opportunities and to match these job availabilities with the skills of Italian immigrants petitioning for entrance under the new legislation. Thus, the ACIM engaged in a tedious process of interaction with individual chapters to assess the employment needs in specific geographical areas and provide the names of immigrants who could fulfill such needs.

As the ACIM expanded its efforts, the organization began proving to national political leaders that the Italian community could provide the organizational strength for securing the necessities required by law. The national ACIM devoted time and resources in order to organize and carry out its goals strategically. Letters from the ACIM headquarters indicate that the national organization employed a large team of staff members who had thousands of records that contained pictures, vital statistics of the applicant and family group, their knowledge of languages and professional skills in some 34 categories. Farmers, vineyard workers, tailors, construction workers, stonecutters and

domestics are listed among the most needed workers during the campaign effort to find jobs assurances.⁸⁹

In addition to matching employment needs with immigrant applicants, the national headquarters developed an action plan known as the “pilot committee plan” for local community leaders to acquire assurances and sponsors. Correspondence from letters suggest a plan that involved local ACIM members approaching Italo-American clubs or societies, tradesmen, industrial leaders and welfare leaders to form committees that could sponsor one family per parish or one family per club, etc. Within each committee that “adopted” an individual, one person would act as sponsor, another guarantee a job, the third person could subsequently acquire housing. National ACIM leaders believed their recommended committee plan was proven to arouse support from communities and inspire additional encouragement to other groups to take part in the program.⁹⁰

By mid-1955, the efforts of the ACIM began to reach fruition. Letters indicate that 15,000 visas to Italian immigrants had been issued by May 1955 and that the demand for visas from Italian immigrants surged. As the ACIM and other Italian organizations maximized their vast local networks and worked tirelessly to prove their abilities to national leaders, successfully meeting the allotted visas remained crucial for demonstrating the organizational strength of Italians. In fact, the Italian community managed to exceed expectations required by the Refugee Act as the Eisenhower Administration announced in late summer 1955 that the Italian Program was so

⁸⁹ Letter from ACIM to Local Chapters 5 May 1955, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

⁹⁰ Letter from ACIM to Local Chapters 5 May 1955, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

successful that a cut off date for accepting new applications was December, 31, 1955; an entire year early. The announcement by the Eisenhower Administration was necessitated by the fact that the Italian quota had already been oversubscribed.⁹¹

ACIM records indicate that of the 60,000 visas allotted to Italy, 59,612 have been issued as of July 20, 1956 and approximately 49,000 Italians has already entered the United States.⁹² This impressive accomplishment is a testament to the intricate organizing and planning done by the ACIM and other groups. Moreover, the feat demonstrates the strength of the Italian identity in a time when restrictive legal quotas designated Italians as an ethnicity not always desired. In terms of Italian ethnicity, the carrying out of these legal provisions reflected a dialectical process of Italian Americans slowly changing their public image and the desirability of their ethnicity. First, the process reflects Italian American groups lobbying for a new image of Italian immigrants and a corresponding change in the willingness of government leaders and the general public to accept Italian Americans without prejudice. However, the early success experienced by the Italian community did not cease following the successful coordination of the relief act. In early 1956, the Eisenhower Administration announced that approximately 50,000 visas allotted for Germany and Austria under the Refugee Act would not be met by the current demand and that these unused quotas should be reallocated to Italy and Greece. In light of the new information, national ACIM leaders began recommending and urging all local chapters to

⁹¹ Letter from ACIM to Local Chapters 26 January 1956, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

⁹² Letter from ACIM to Local Chapters 2 August 1956, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

resume sponsorship projects and to obtain new assurances through the existing framework.⁹³

Facing immense odds of locating housing and jobs for 60,000 immigrants, the Italian community proved its strength by the success experienced under the Refugee Relief Act of 1953. The calculations by ACIM leaders proved to be accurate, as the successful coordination of the act did in fact affect their ability to impact future legislation in their favor. The Eisenhower Administration recognized how committed the Italian community was to bringing more Italians to the United States that the Administration called on Congress to allow more Italians to enter. As will be seen in the following chapter, the ACIM and other groups rallied to continue their political accomplishments by promoting further refugee relief legislation. Moreover, Italian organizations began preparing to engage in an even more intense lobbying campaign to overturn the McCarran-Act and end the national origins quotas that damned certain groups of immigrants from immigrating to America.

⁹³ Letter from ACIM to Local Chapters 26 January 1956, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

Chapter 3. – The Contributions of the ACIM: Progression Toward the Abolishment of National Origin Quotas

“The American Committee on Italian Migration for 11 years has been dedicated to the modernization of outdated immigration laws. It has achieved substantial progress and is highly regarded all over the United States, especially in Washington. It re-united families long separated by needless laws. It helps bring craftsmen of types scarce in the U.S. to this country to help balance its labor force. ACIM urges you to join in this eminently humane and economically sound service to the U.S. and to foreign countries most oriented toward the U.S.”

-ACIM Pamphlet, circa 1965 (ACIM Collection: Pamphlet)

While passage of the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 appeared as a triumph for the American Committee on Italian Migration, the legislation materialized as a test for the group's organizational strength and as an opportunity for the Italian community to prove its resolve. Not only did the ACIM find sponsors, housing and employment for 60,000 Italian refugees included in the Relief Act, it surpassed expectations by doing so in just over one year. With more Italians petitioning for entrance into the United States and the ACIM's ability to accommodate more entrants, the Eisenhower Administration took notice by publically supporting the allocation of unused quotas for Italians. Lobbying for the passage of a new refugee act, the organization increased its efforts to form a political presence and to exercise its massive network of members across the United States. Moreover, the ACIM began fostering relationships with congressional leaders, including a future President of the United States, to enact legislation that would directly favor Italians attempting to enter the country. With one political victory already under its belt, the ACIM worked relentlessly toward its goal of repealing the McCarran-Walter Act and ending the national origin system in the United States. This chapter will examine and analyze the efforts of the ACIM during the late 1950s and early 1960s that eventually contributed to the successful passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

After the successful implementation of 60,000 quotas under the 1953 Relief Act, the ACIM sought to advance the importance of immigration issues among mainstream political parties and to continue its momentum in the political arena. The leaders of the Italian community recognized that if the law remained the most daunting barrier for immigrants attempting to enter the country, then their community needed to lobby those who directly participated the lawmaking process. Thus, leaders of the ACIM turned their attention to gaining the consideration of power political parties in the upcoming presidential election. In a bold political move, the ACIM directed all of its statewide organizations to lobby the Republican and Democratic National Conventions regarding immigration issues during the 1956 presidential election. Specifically, the national headquarters urged its state networks to advise leaders from both political parties to include favorable positions on immigration in their respective party platforms.⁹⁴

Recognizing the influence that national party establishment held during presidential elections, the ACIM utilized its members to advocate the liberalization of immigration laws in the face of national origins quotas. Although the Italian community recognized that party platforms occupied a mainly symbolic role, interaction with high-level party officials from both sides of the aisle increased the likelihood that the ACIM could be granted access regardless of which party claimed electoral victory. Moreover, while such an effort may not have directly influenced legislative outcomes favorable to Italians, the overtly political move by the national headquarters reveals that the

⁹⁴ Letter from ACIM to Local Chapters 2 August 1956, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

organization sought to increase its standing in the political arena and advance the relevance of immigration issues among major parties.

Efforts to Extend the Refugee Relief Act of 1953

By mid-1956, the Eisenhower Administration followed through on its initial call to admit more Italians under an extension of the Refugee Relief Act of 1953. Utilizing unused quotas from Germany and Austria, new legislation emerged in Congress that allocated the additional admission of 20,000 immigrants from Italy and 10,000 immigrants from Greece.⁹⁵ The extension received political support due to the numerous Italian immigrants who remained in the “pipeline,” or those who received assurances and whose paperwork was filled but could not enter the country because the Italian quota had already been filled. The ACIM responded to the new legislation by imploring its vast network of members to contact their senators and congressmen to support the bill. Several letters from the summer of 1956 indicate the lengths the national headquarters went in organizing its supporters to lobby Congress. The ACIM urged its loyal members to write, wire, and visit their congressional members and the individual members who sat on the committee that exercised discretion over the bill.⁹⁶

In addition to rousing its members to take action, letters from the ACIM Collection reveal the measures taken by the organization to establish working relationships with powerful congressional leaders who had a direct influence on the fate of legislation. In fact, Democratic Congressmen Sidney Yates, and Melvin Price as well as Republican

⁹⁵ Letter from ACIM to Local Chapters 8 June 1956, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

⁹⁶ Letter from ACIM to Local Chapter 22 June 1956, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

Senators Everett Dirksen and William Langer all sent personal letters responding to Donanzan's calls to admit more Italians through an extension of the Relief Act. The correspondence between the ACIM and these government officials during debate on this legislation demonstrates the serious efforts by the organization to change immigration laws not only by utilizing its thousands of members but also by collaborating with political leaders.

However, the ACIM experienced a minor setback by the end of the summer in 1956 when the proposed legislation failed in the U.S. House of Representatives after passing in the U.S. Senate by a voice vote.⁹⁷ While defeat of this legislation served as a temporary reminder that bills with popular political support could fail, the ACIM did not shrink from defeat. Demonstrating the resolve of the Italian community, the ACIM quickly began working with three members of Congress, including future President—John F. Kennedy--to reintroduce legislation that covered similar aims of the failed relief act. Cold War liberalism and Kennedy's Irish Catholic background are relevant in his role in shepherding immigration reform legislation before and during his presidency. With such anti-Irish and anti-Catholic sentiment throughout the 19th century that mirrored anti-Southern and Eastern European sentiment during the twentieth century, Kennedy's background most likely contributed to his willingness to support immigration reform. As Ron Takaki notes, "Representing a Catholic group seeking to settle in fiercely Protestant society, the Irish immigrants were targets of American nativist hostility... 'previewing'

⁹⁷ Letter from ACIM to Local Chapters 2 August 1956, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

experiences that would later be shared by Italians, Poles and other groups.”⁹⁸ Kennedy’s Catholic Irish heritage, and his role as the future first Catholic president likely caused him to favor reforming discriminatory immigration policies. In addition to Kennedy’s heritage, foreign policy matters such as his efforts to combat the Soviet Union and communism likely influenced him to support the liberalization of immigration policies. Kennedy recognized the hypocrisy that existed between America’s desire to support democratic governments abroad while America’s domestic immigration policies discriminated against various ethnicities and racial groups. Some argue that Kennedy used immigration reform as a “psychological tool” meant to convey that American ideals of freedom and democracy were superior to authoritarian governments in Cuba, China and Eastern Europe.⁹⁹

By 1957 the leaders of the ACIM issued an “action memo” to local chapters explaining that members of Congress introduced three separate pieces of legislation that addressed many of the issues covered in the previous bill that failed to pass the House. These bills reflected the objectives of the ACIM, namely the admission of 24,000 “pipeline” immigrants from Italy. Furthermore, the organization outlined the specific contents of the different pieces of legislation, one sponsored by Democratic Congressman Kenneth Keating, another by Republican Congressman Francis Walter and a third sponsored by then Democratic Senator John F. Kennedy. In addition to the “pipeline” cases, the legislation extended the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 and allowed 18,000 spouses and children of Italian immigrants to enter the country. The fact that the ACIM

⁹⁸ Takaki, “A Different Mirror,” 69.

⁹⁹ “The Immigration Act of 1965,” Asian Nation, <http://www.asian-nation.org/1965-immigration-act.shtml>, (Accessed 31 May 2012).

managed to persuade three members of Congress to introduce and sponsor legislation that directly answered their concerns is quite impressive.

Continuing to inform and involve its member network, the ACIM listed the legislators who sat upon the Sub-Committees on Immigration in the U.S. House and Senate and encouraged local members by stating, “Now is the time to flood the members of the Senate and House with letters and telegrams and wherever possible, through personal contact for action.”¹⁰⁰ This excerpt shows that the organization fully prepared itself for another hard fought political lobbying campaign to persuade members of Congress that immigration laws should be liberalized in order to allow more immigrants from Southern Europe.

However, the most revealing aspect of this process is the fact that the ACIM leaders referred to one of the pieces of legislation as “the ACIM bill” because it mirrored all of the points the organization desired. The letter demonstrated the progress the ACIM made in exercising its political force and its direct access to very powerful members of Congress that could push for legislation that favorably affected Italians. Moreover, such contact and interaction with these legislators obviously had its benefits when Kennedy ended up in the White House just four years later.

With political support from President Eisenhower, the sponsorship of legislation that crossed party lines and a massive lobbying campaign by the ACIM, the extension of the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 passed both houses of Congress and President

¹⁰⁰ Letter from ACIM to Local Chapters 17 June 1957, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

Eisenhower signed the bill into law on September 11, 1957.¹⁰¹ Encouraged by their success, the ACIM lobbied for the passage of an additional extension of the Relief Act sponsored by Congressman Francis Walter that allowed the admission of 57,000 aliens of different countries. Italians accounted for over 30,000 included in this legislation and President Eisenhower signed the bill into law on September 22, 1959.¹⁰²

Successful enactment of multiple pieces of legislation that extended the Relief Act allowed thousands of Italians to enter the United States and served as a “second victory” for the ACIM. Rather than focusing on employment and housing requirements which federal law required, the ACIM’s effort to change immigration laws supports my claim that the American legal system posed the most pressing challenge for Italians. While language barriers, difficulties with employment and housing represented serious concerns for these immigrants, federal laws mandated job and housing assurances before one could even immigrate. By progressively amending these laws and achieving success through a pragmatic approach, the ACIM and other groups set its sights on their ultimate goal of terminating national origins quotas under McCarran-Walter.

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965

Advocates of more liberal immigration laws earned a major political triumph with the presidential election of 1960 and so did the ACIM. Senator John F. Kennedy, who worked personally with the ACIM while in Congress, now held the most politically powerful position in the United States as commander-in-chief. Seizing upon this

¹⁰¹ Letter from ACIM to Local Chapters 10 December 1957, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

¹⁰² Letter from ACIM to Local Chapters 22 September 1959, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

opportunity, the ACIM did not waste time in continuing to advocate for the modernization of immigration laws. In fact, over 200 members of the organization met with President Kennedy at the White House in 1963 for the organization's national symposium on immigration issues, which served as a method for the ACIM to personally advocate on behalf of changing immigration policies that discriminated against Southern and Eastern Europeans.

In an article from the *New York Times* from June 12, 1963, President Kennedy announced that he would send new legislation to Congress that allowed the family members of Italian Americans to immigrate to the United States. Embracing reform, Kennedy mingled with members of the ACIM and recognized the need to change the system of national origin quotas stating that while progress had been made in the late 1950s, "much unfinished business remained."¹⁰³ The assertion by President Kennedy marked a great change for the ACIM as the Administration now openly supported the complete revision of immigration laws instead of amending or extending the current framework. The front page article in the *New York Times* and the pictures of the President surrounded by members of the ACIM created positive momentum for the group and highlighted the importance of revisiting how America treated those petitioning for entrance. Again, Kennedy's own ethnic heritage as an Irish Catholic, and his role as the first Catholic president likely caused him to be more inclined to publicly support comprehensive immigration reform. Furthermore, the Kennedy Administration's willingness to support immigration reform is linked with the changes ushered in by the Civil Rights Movement and Kennedy's bold move to support civil rights legislation. As

¹⁰³ *The New York Times*, 12 June 1963, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

Graham explains, “the national origins system was not based on race but nationality, but in the intense climate of the Civil Rights crusade the two were easily elided into equivalent equals.”¹⁰⁴

In order to push Congress to act on Kennedy’s immigration reforms, the Chicago Chapter of the ACIM spearheaded an effort to hold a massive immigration rally in Chicago during the winter of 1963. It sponsored a full-page article in the Italian newspaper *Fra Noi* explaining how the rally could pressure Congress to make changes to federal law that benefited Italian immigrants seeking admission to the country. The rally would take place at a theatre known as the Arie Crown which could hold up to 6,000 people. In addition, the ACIM and other Italian organizations would provide transportation to the theatre and prominent celebrities and politicians such as Senator Paul Douglas planned to entertain and speak to those at the rally. Most revealing about the article is the urgent tone that explained the need to “pack the theatre to full capacity” and the importance of making the rally a success. The strong tone of the language reveals the pressing realization that if the Italian community failed to act now, that it could be years before the opportunity came along again to change immigration laws. The Italian community conveyed the sense of urgency in a specific statement:

WE MUST MOVE! ...If we don’t speak now we must SHUT UP and be happy with laws that allow only 5,000 of the more than 150,000 Italians who are anxious to migrate to this nation. We must SHUT UP over such discrimination, which allows the Northern European countries quotas as high as 75,000 immigrants a year.¹⁰⁵

The capitalization of “Shut Up” and “We must move” emphasized the limited window of opportunity that existed to end national origin quotas and the discrimination

¹⁰⁴ Graham, *Unguarded Gates*, 89.

¹⁰⁵ *Fra Noi*, 11 November 1963, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

against countries in Southern Europe that originated almost fifty years earlier. Another article regarding the immigration rally captured the frustration with how federal laws acted as a barrier to immigrants with the headline “We Have Been Labeled Bandits Too Long: Laws Have Labeled Us Bandits!”¹⁰⁶ This particular article depicted immigration law as labeling certain ethnic groups as “bandits” which gave the impression to Americans that it was acceptable to practice discrimination against such groups. Its angry tone urged all Italians to seize the occasion by taking action to change how the law treated ethnic minorities. With political support in the executive and legislative branches and across the Italian community, the ACIM took advantage of the favorable climate and the changing views on racial and ethnic differences originating from the Civil Rights Movement by staging the rally and also working to recruit support from radio broadcasters, labor unions, the business community and religious leaders.

After President Kennedy’s tragic assassination in November 1963, President Lyndon B. Johnson continued his predecessor’s efforts to overhaul US immigration laws. In his 1964 State of the Union Address, Johnson embraced the immigration reforms initiated by Kennedy. On the subject of national origins quotas he stated, “Such a concept is utterly unworthy of our traditions and ideals.”¹⁰⁷ Sponsored by Congressman Emmanuel Celler and co-sponsored by Senator Phillip Hart, legislation to abolish national origin quotas and completely reformed immigration law made its way through the U.S. House and Senate. Overall, the legislation increased the number of immigrants allowed to enter the country on a yearly basis and based immigrant entrance on factors

¹⁰⁶ Victor Arrigo, News Article, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

¹⁰⁷ Letter from ACIM to Local Chapters 31 January 1964, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

such as employment skills and family already present in the U.S., rather than on their country of origin in relation to the national census.¹⁰⁸

At the same time that the legislation gained traction in the legislature, the ACIM received support from organized labor and radio broadcasters that eventually proved to be critical to passing the Hart-Celler Act or what became known as the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Supporters of the legislation that lobbied for its passage included numerous organizations representing ethnic groups associated with “New Immigration” that hailed from Northeastern and Midwestern urban states. Moreover, business leaders and organizations including Western “big agriculture” lobbied for the bill’s passage.¹⁰⁹ Most liberals sympathized with the ethnic groups and other lobbying interests that supported this legislation because they viewed immigration reform as a “smaller theater” of the Civil Rights Movement that did not involve the dangers of marching in the South.¹¹⁰ In terms of Italian interests, The Italian Broadcast and Press Group launched an extensive radio broadcasting campaign to persuade public opinion on immigration reform and to help with the passage of the legislation. In addition, the broadcasting group encouraged individuals to contact their representatives and secured 15,000 signatures for petitions that supported the legislation.¹¹¹

However, strong support of more liberal immigration laws did not come without opposition from various groups across the country. Similar to the heated debates over

¹⁰⁸ ACIM News Article, 12 June 1965, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

¹⁰⁹ Graham, *Unguarded Gates*, 89.

¹¹⁰ Graham, *Unguarded Gates*, 92.

¹¹¹ Letter from Italian Broadcast and Press Group to ACIM Headquarters, 16 April 1965, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

immigration laws that swept the country during the 1920s, restrictionist organizations countered the ACIM and other groups' efforts to change immigration laws. In a memo to local chapters, leaders of the ACIM explained that restrictionist groups had "bombarded" congressional offices with messages in opposition to the legislation and that the Daughters of the American Revolution, the American Legion and other patriotic groups publically opposed the end of national origins quotas because they feared the threat of communism.¹¹² Thus, the ACIM understood that passage of the Hart-Celler Act would not avoid a contentious political battle and expressed to local chapters the need to continue calling and contacting congressional leaders to encourage leaders to support of the bill.¹¹³

Jumping in to what emerged as a very public battle over immigration, the AFL-CIO issued a public statement in June 1965, expressing their strong support for Johnson's proposal to end national origins quotas. For decades, the AFL-CIO and other organized labor groups served as an employment "antidote" for Italians and other European ethnicities, which helped these groups find jobs especially during the Great Depression. Moreover, organized labor provided another means of political organizing for Italians besides their activities in ethnic organizations or mutual aid societies found in this thesis. In fact, Italians came to occupy powerful leadership positions within the AFL-CIO beyond local levels.¹¹⁴ Such close interaction with European ethnicities and the fact that immigrants comprised a large portion of organized labor's constituency naturally inclined this labor giant to publically support comprehensive immigration reform.

¹¹² Graham, *Unguarded Gates*, 90.

¹¹³ Memo from ACIM to Local Chapters 22 April 1965, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

¹¹⁴ Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*, 133-134.

The labor giant sided with pro-reform factions because union leaders believed such laws sent an international message of ethnic intolerance toward specific regions of the world.¹¹⁵ The director of legislative affairs for the AFL-CIO took further action by testifying before the United States Senate Judiciary Committee in support of the Hart-Celler Act. With prominent groups aligning with those in favor and in opposition to the bill, the ACIM continued to build new relationships with congressional leaders who could affect change.

Congressman Frank Annunzio, who represented the Chicago area, developed a strong voice for the ACIM and especially for immigration reforms. Annunzio, an Italian American who had previously served as an Illinois labor leader, felt a close connection with the ACIM efforts due to his heritage and desire to benefit the Italian community. Moreover, Annunzio's role in organized labor exposed him to many European ethnicities and immigrants that comprised groups such as the AFL-CIO, which likely increased his inclination to support immigration reforms. In the numerous correspondences between Annunzio and ACIM leaders, the Congressman expressed his support for legislation that overturned McCarran-Walter and emphasized his commitment to ensuring the end of national origins quotas. During the heated debate over Johnson's reform bill, Annunzio gave various speeches on the House floor and testified before the House Sub-Committee on Immigration and Nationality in support of the legislation.¹¹⁶ Developing a close relationship with an Italian American who served in Congress such as Annunzio proved important. First, it allowed the ACIM to have a personal contact who mutually identified

¹¹⁵ ACIM News Article 12 June 1965, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

¹¹⁶ Letter from Congressman Frank Annunzio to ACIM Headquarters 7 April 1965, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

with the organization's purpose and who championed the cause of the Italian community while in the legislative arena. Moreover, the visible relationship with Annunzio brought attention to the fact that Italian Americans could be productive –and successful members of American society, which only increased the case for why immigration quotas needed reform.

In addition to Congressman Annunzio, the ACIM forged a close working relationship with United States Senator Edward Kennedy who became one of the strongest advocates for the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Senator Kennedy felt a desire to carry out the reforms sought initially by his brother JFK and in a letter to the ACIM stated, "I am deeply concerned with the unfair quota system under the present Immigration Act and I believe this system should and must be abolished."¹¹⁷ Kennedy's heritage as an Irish Catholic, his attitude toward the bill and working relationship with the ACIM demonstrate how congressional attitudes on immigration had changed from the overtly anti-ethnic tone during the 1920 debates. Furthermore, the change in congressional attitude represents how public views on European ethnicity and their racial status changed over time. As Takaki notes, just as the Irish had been exposed to anti-immigrant hostility that eventually changed along with their status from non-white to white, so too did the racial status of Italians begin to change by the 1950s.

Such personal interaction with influential leaders definitely contributed to the successful efforts by the ACIM to enact favorable policy changes. On another note, the organization kept its members informed on the progress of the Hart-Celler Act and

¹¹⁷ Letter from U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy to ACIM Headquarters 14 May 1964, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

suggested different actions that members could take to favorably impact the bill. Through a newsletter called the “Listening Post” the organization commented on the progress of legislation in the Senate and House and also provided a forecast for the legislation’s success. The “Listening Post” advised local members to schedule meetings with congressmen, to call their representatives’ offices and contact groups with related interests to get them involved.¹¹⁸ By keeping ACIM members informed and encouraging their participation, the ACIM maintained their two front political strategy for achieving their goals; forging relationships with political leaders while pressuring ACIM members to contact and lobby their legislators. Furthermore, the ACIM’s political strategies served larger purposes in the fact that Italian Americans gained political experience and these activities served as a means to incorporate Italians into the broader political framework. As a result, the ACIM’s political efforts may have inadvertently contributed to society’s changing views on whiteness, especially during the 1950s in which Italians, Jews and Greeks became more actively involved in the political realm.

The debate on immigration reform raged on throughout the summer of 1965 and the outlook for passage of immigration reform remained favorable. In a forecast from a “Listening Post” in July 1965, the message stated that, “officials are still expressing cautious optimism regarding the passage of the bill.”¹¹⁹ By August 1965, the immigration reform bill passed out of the House Judiciary Committee and the House leadership scheduled debate on the legislation during the week of August 23, 1965. Remaining

¹¹⁸ “Listening Post” Letter from ACIM Headquarters to Local Chapters 28 June 1965, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

¹¹⁹ “Listening Post” Letter from ACIM Headquarters to Local Chapters 28 July 1965, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

focused and optimistic, the ACIM encouraged their members to do “everything in their power” to press for the passage of the legislation.¹²⁰ In an early victory for the ACIM and the Italian community, the United States House of Representatives passed the Hart-Cellar Act on August 25, 1965 with a vote of 318-95.¹²¹ Referred to as the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the legislation completely abolished the national origins quotas by June 1968 and replaced the previous policies with a system based on professional skills and family relations living in the United States.

Specifically, the Hart-Cellar Act substituted quotas with hemispheric caps and determined the entrance of immigrants based on classes known as “preferences.”¹²² The legislation annually allowed 170,000 immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere, 120,000 from the Western Hemisphere and a limit of 20,000 annually from any nation.¹²³ The legislation set different levels of immigrant “preferences” or categories that specified worker skills, family already present in America including spouses, children or other relatives and the level of need for one’s occupation based on labor shortages.¹²⁴

Following passage of the bill in the House, the ACIM remained positive that their efforts

¹²⁰ Letter from ACIM Headquarters to Local Chapters 16 August 1965, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

¹²¹ Letter from ACIM Headquarters to Local Chapters 26 August 1965, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

¹²² Letter from ACIM Headquarters to Local Chapters 4 October 1965, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

¹²³ Roger Daniels, *Historians on America*, “The Immigration Act of 1965,” <http://www.america.gov/st/educ-english/2008/April/20080423214226eaifas0.9637982.html> (accessed 10 February 2012).

¹²⁴ Letter from ACIM Headquarters to Local Chapters 4 October 1965, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

would prove successful and, on September 22, 1965, the United States Senate passed the Immigration Act by a vote of 76-18.¹²⁵

After reconciliation between the House and Senate versions of the Immigration and Nationality Act, President Johnson signed the historic bill into law in a momentous ceremony in front of the Statue of Liberty on October 3, 1965.¹²⁶ In Johnson's address to those at the bill signing he commented on the fair nature of the new immigration system by stating:

This bill says simply that from this day forth those wishing to immigrate to America shall be admitted on the basis of their skills and their close relationship to those already here. This is a simple test, and it is a fair test.¹²⁷

Thus, with the enactment of the Immigration and Nationality Act, the ACIM successfully achieved its primary objective set in its first meeting in 1951: overturning federal immigration laws that blatantly discriminated against certain ethnicities from "undesired" countries. No longer would Italians enter the United States under a legal framework that associated their ethnicity with an area of the world not fully compatible with democratic ideals. Equally important, the passage of this legislation proved the organizational strength of the Italian community and served as a way to break down legal barriers for ethnic minorities that sought entrance to the United States. Demonstrating the critical role that the ACIM had in unifying the Italian community and lobbying on

¹²⁵ Letter from ACIM Headquarters to Local Chapters 4 October 1965, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

¹²⁶ Letter from ACIM Headquarters to Local Chapters 4 October 1965, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

¹²⁷ President Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks at the Signing of the Immigration Bill, Liberty Island, New York," 3 October 1965, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/651003.asp> (accessed 16 February 2012).

behalf of ethnic groups in favor of reform, President Johnson remarked, “No other group has worked harder or with more dedication than the American Committee on Italian Migration.”¹²⁸

While the ACIM and the Italian community across America rejoiced with this victory for reform and appreciated the repudiation of McCarran-Walter, the organization understood it had a large task ahead of implementing the vast changes the legislation entailed. When the positive reaction by the Italian community settled, the ACIM set its sights on successfully coordinating the historic Act. The leaders of the organization explained to local chapters the importance of providing a full-scale program of information and assistance to petitioners interested in the admission of their immigrant relatives. By announcing the establishment of an ACIM office in Naples, Italy, leaders of the organization desired a “bold program of assistance” for the migrants themselves prior to their departure from Italy. Moreover, ACIM officials expressed the desire for an expanded assistance program after immigrants arrived in the United States to promote their assimilation into “spiritual life, economy, society and the culture of America.”¹²⁹

Based on letters following the passage of the Act and the establishment of a new office in Italy, it is apparent that the ACIM remained dedicated to assisting Italians both before and after they immigrated to the United States. Following through on their promise to carry out the provisions of the legislation, the ACIM reported that just after seven months of operation of the new law that 24,967 Italians already gained admission

¹²⁸ “The American Committee on Italian Migration: History and Mission,” <http://www.acimimmigra.org/history2.html> (Accessed 31 May 2012).

¹²⁹ Letter from ACIM Headquarters to Local Chapters 2 November 1965, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

to the United States as immigrants and that another 25,000 Italian immigrants will have immigrated by June 1968.¹³⁰ Although the organization remained active in government issues after reaching their principal political goals, the ACIM changed their primary focus as an immigrant organization by revitalizing their social programs that assisted Italian immigrants and ensured their successful contributions to the communities in which they settled.

Whether championing political causes or assisting an impoverished immigrant in acquiring adequate employment, the ACIM set ambitious political and social goals that they relentlessly attempted to execute. After the passage of the Refugee Relief Act of 1953, the ACIM worked persistently to coordinate housing, employment and sponsors for 60,000 Italian immigrants. Proving the strength of its members and illustrating its potential to enact favorable political changes, the ACIM continued its efforts by forging relationships with government leaders while simultaneously summoning its supporters to take action. Not only did the ACIM directly influence the extension of the Relief Act, the group remained poised for the abolishment of national origin quotas. By engaging advocates in Congress, planning a massive rally, securing the support of labor groups and rousing its membership, the ACIM played an important role in enacting the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Passage of this historic Act not only abolished a discriminatory framework of immigration law, it provided the opportunity for thousands of Italians and other ethnicities to enter the United States with the freedom from being labeled a bandit by the law.

¹³⁰ Letter from ACIM Headquarters to Local Chapters 19 January 1967, The American Committee on Italian Migration, Chicago Chapter (Ill.) Records, Italian American Collection, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota.

Conclusion

After reviewing the development of immigration laws from the 1920s to the 1960s, it is clear that sweeping changes occurred in how federal laws treat the status of individuals seeking entrance to the United States. In a period of over forty years, the American legal system managed to prevent millions from immigrating to the United States based on fears rooted in race, ethnicity and ideology. Careful examination of the debates on national origins quotas reveals that American political leaders advocated restrictionist laws to preserve the stability of American democracy in the aftermath of both World Wars. Restrictionist laws largely prevented Italian immigrants from entering the United States and labeled those of Mediterranean ethnicity as “bandits.” Instead of remaining silent and accepting their fate after unsuccessful attempts to end ethnic discrimination in federal immigration policies in the 1920s, the Italian community mobilized in the 1950s to assist the members of their community in finding employment and housing. The period of the 1950s and 1960s, in which the Civil Rights Movement and other legal reforms gained strength, offered a more favorable environment for Italian mutual aid societies to successfully contribute to immigration reform. Moreover, President Kennedy’s heritage, his Catholic background and the prominence of Cold War liberalism created new opportunities for the Italian community to take effective political action.

Furthermore, Italian organizations such as the ACIM and OSIA rallied to abolish the national origins systems by engaging in a political campaign that included forging relationships with political leaders and mobilizing local communities by stressing the importance of new opportunities to shape policies that directly influenced their racial

status and the statuses of their immigrant friends and family members. Such political engagement not only influenced new legislative policies, but also indirectly contributed to the transformation of Italian racial status, which previously occupied a tenuous position. Despite difficulties in learning English, adapting to new ways of life and overcoming discrimination, the efforts of Italian organizations point to the law as the central barrier from which many of these difficulties emanated. Moreover, this point provides explanatory power in understanding why these Italian groups heavily lobbied Congress and the White House to change such laws.

Reflecting on the social and political efforts of these Italian mutual aid societies, it is evident that the goals set forth by the ACIM and other Italian organizations resulted in success not only for Italian immigrants who desired to settle in the United States, but for all ethnicities and racial groups that the law formerly restricted. In itself, the abolishment of national origin quotas removed federal policies that blatantly discriminated against immigrants for their racial and ethnic backgrounds. While policymakers during this time did not believe that passage of the Immigration Act of 1965 would revolutionize immigration policy, the passage of this law definitely changed the pattern of migration that flowed into the United States. In fact, the 1965 Act ushered 18 million immigrants into the United States from 1965 to 1995. Moreover, from 1980 to 1993, Asian and Latin American immigrants together comprised nearly 82 percent of all immigrants who came to the United States compared with only 13 percent coming from Europe during this period.¹³¹ These facts reveal that while Italians initially benefited from the removal of national origins quotas in terms of their ability to migrate and their ethnic status under

¹³¹ "Three Decades of Mass Immigration: The Legacy of the 1965 Immigration Act," Center for Immigration Studies, <http://www.cis.org/articles/1995/back395.html> (Accessed 31 May 2012).

law, the 1965 Act eventually had important implications for which racial groups and ethnicities immigrated to America after the 1960s. In a long term sense, the removal of national origins quotas and restrictive provisions represented a “victory” for those who were formerly victimized by these laws and paved the way for millions of immigrants from around the world to enter the United States.

Aside from the pattern of immigration that followed the 1965 Act, the successful efforts of Italian groups headed by the ACIM most likely contributed to changing views about immigrants during the 1960s. If the law no longer codified anti-immigrant sentiment and discriminated against the ethnicity of immigrants that could enter the country, then those who maintained these views no longer held beliefs that were consistent with the law. Hence, the successful contributions of the ACIM and OSIA in changing legal policies extended beyond those of practical value and may have influenced prevailing views on the value and status of immigrants in American society. Although the topic of immigration remains a contemporary political issue that is often misunderstood and exploited by political groups, understanding the history of immigration and the groups who advocated for change in the past has the ability to provide solutions to modern problems facing our political system today.